

Life in the UK

A practical guide for overseas students — public transport in London, Manchester and Birmingham; finding student accommodation; and what to expect after arrival.

Verify before you rely on this. Fares, rules and websites change. Confirm on the official sources at the end of each section. AIMarketer.ie is not an immigration or housing adviser.

1. Public transport in the UK's major student cities

London — Transport for London (TfL)

- London runs on the **Underground (Tube)**, Overground, Elizabeth line, DLR, buses, trams, and the Thames Clipper river bus.
- Pay with a **contactless bank card**, phone (Apple/Google Pay), or an **Oyster card**. Daily and weekly fare caps apply automatically.
- Full-time students living in London can apply for an **18+ Student Oyster photocard** for 30% off adult travelcards.
- TfL journeys, fares, status: tfl.gov.uk
- Student Oyster: tfl.gov.uk/fares/free-and-discounted-travel/18-plus-student-oyster-photocard

Manchester — Transport for Greater Manchester (TfGM)

- Manchester has the **Metrolink tram network**, the new **Bee Network buses** (yellow buses, contactless capping), and local trains.
- Buy tickets on the **Bee Network app** or contactless on trams and buses.
- Plan and pay: tfgm.com
- Metrolink: tfgm.com/tickets-and-passes/tram

Birmingham — Transport for West Midlands (TfWM)

- Birmingham runs on **National Express West Midlands buses**, the **West Midlands Metro tram**, and local trains (West Midlands Railway).
- Use the **Swift card** or contactless for pay-as-you-go travel, with student discounts via the **Swift Student card**.
- Network Map & tickets: tfwm.org.uk
- Swift card: swiftcard.network-westmidlands.com

Intercity travel

- Trains: buy on nationalrail.co.uk or trainline.com.
- A **16–25 Railcard** (or 26–30 Railcard) saves 1/3 on most rail fares — 16-25railcard.co.uk.
- Long-distance coaches: nationalexpress.com and megabus.com.

2. Finding student accommodation

The UK has a large market of **purpose-built student accommodation (PBSA)** and private rentals. Start looking as soon as you accept your offer — the best rooms in Russell Group cities fill up months in advance.

Leading student accommodation website

- **Unite Students** — the UK's largest PBSA operator, across 25+ cities: [unitestudents.com](https://www.unitestudents.com)
- **student.com** — global search engine that aggregates most UK PBSA operators: [student.com](https://www.student.com)
- **UniAcco** — [uniacco.com](https://www.uniacco.com)
- **iQ Student Accommodation** — [iqstudentaccommodation.com](https://www.iqstudentaccommodation.com)
- **Chapter, Vita Student, Yugo, Nido, Fresh** — well-known PBSA brands.

University halls

- Most universities **guarantee first-year accommodation** to international students who apply by the stated deadline. Apply through your university's accommodation portal as soon as you have your unconditional offer or CAS.

Private rentals (2nd year onward)

- **Rightmove** — [rightmove.co.uk](https://www.rightmove.co.uk)
- **Zoopla** — [zoopla.co.uk](https://www.zoopla.co.uk)
- **SpareRoom** (rooms in shared houses) — [spareroom.co.uk](https://www.spareroom.co.uk)
- **OpenRent** — [openrent.co.uk](https://www.openrent.co.uk)

Renting basics

- Expect a **deposit of up to 5 weeks' rent**, which must be protected in a government-approved scheme (DPS, MyDeposits, TDS).
- Landlords must carry out a **Right to Rent** check — bring your passport, BRP/eVisa, and CAS/university letter.
- Ask for an **EPC (energy rating)**, gas safety certificate, and a written tenancy agreement (AST).
- Never pay a 'holding fee' larger than one week's rent, and never transfer money before viewing.

3. What to expect after arrival in the UK

First 7 days

- **Collect your BRP** (if issued) from the Post Office within 10 days of arrival, or activate your **eVisa** via UKVI account.
- Report to your **university's international office** and complete enrolment — this is a Student visa condition.
- Register with a local **NHS GP** — [nhs.uk/find-a-gp](https://www.nhs.uk/find-a-gp) (free at the point of use, funded by the IHS you already paid).
- Open a UK bank account (Monzo, Starling, Revolut are quickest; HSBC, Barclays, Lloyds, NatWest for traditional accounts). Bring passport, BRP/eVisa, CAS or university enrolment letter, proof of UK address.
- Buy a UK SIM (giffgaff, Lebara, Vodafone, Three, EE, O2) or use an eSIM.

- **TV Licence** — required if you watch or record live TV, or use BBC iPlayer.

Working while studying

- Student visa holders on a degree-level course can usually work **up to 20 hours per week** in term time and full-time in vacations. Check the exact wording on your visa/BRP.
- Apply for a **National Insurance number**: gov.uk/apply-national-insurance-number.
- Look for jobs on indeed.co.uk, reed.co.uk, totaljobs.com, and your university careers portal.
- UK **National Living Wage** (age 21+) is **£12.21/hour** from April 2025 — verify current rate on gov.uk.

Money-saving cards for students

- **TOTUM card** (formerly NUS Extra) — totum.com
- **Student Beans** and **UNiDAYS** — free student discount platforms.
- **16–25 Railcard** for rail discounts — 16-25railcard.co.uk.

Safety and emergencies

- Emergency services: dial **999** (or 112). Non-emergency police: **101**. Non-emergency NHS: **111**.
- Register your address changes with your university and UKVI (via your eVisa account).

Useful official sources

- [UK Council for International Student Affairs \(UKCISA\)](https://www.ukcisa.org)
- [UK Visas and Immigration](https://www.ukvisas.gov)
- [NHS — Healthcare for students](https://www.nhs.uk)
- [gov.uk — Student finance and rights](https://gov.uk)

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